# Low-key Is the Best Key

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# Low-key Is the Best Key

by Azure_K_Mello


Summary

Will's life is hard but his birthday party doesn't have to be.


Notes

This is finally, finally, finally Will's party. I have started a new job and moved since I posted the last story but I never gave up on this! Sorry there's no sex, it just didn't fit.

See the end of the work for more notes

It was early and Will liked that the days were getting longer, sun light was falling on his cheek. Heat warmed his cheek and Will liked it though he though he really should get curtains, Hannibal probably wanted them but was too polite to push. Though, Hannibal had become less and less polite as time had gone on.

Now, he was honest, he told Will when things irritated him and Will liked it more. Gone were the days of well-mannered words. Love and familiarity had made Hannibal relaxed and open. He breathed slowly, he painted the walls in his mind and he felt Hannibal's chest moving. The man was awake but still cuddled into Will. Will opened his eyes and kissed Hannibal's neck.

"Morning," said Will.

"Happy birthday," said Hannibal.

Will smiled, "Thanks."

"Would you like your gift now or after work?"

"I thought the party was my gift," replied Will.

"You are barely tolerating the party," Hannibal said, stroking Will's cheek. He smiled at Will and Will smiled back.

"What about now, is this my present? I think these quiet moments are gifts," he pulled Hannibal closer and slid one leg between the man's. Hannibal adjusted himself, resting his head on Will's chest. Will stroked his back and Hannibal stroked his sides. "This is perfect." He rested his cheek against the top of Hannibal's head.

Hannibal smiled and said, "When would you like your real gift?"

"What time is it?" asked Will.

"We don't have enough time to have sex, breakfast and play with the dogs, even without your gift."

Will chuckled, "Then I want my gift now." Hannibal sat up and Will let his hands trail down the other man's body. "Do I have time to brush my teeth?" Hannibal chuckled. The bathroom upstairs was so much larger than the one downstairs that they would very comfortably share it. They didn't jostle for space. As he washed his face will said, "My bedroom downstairs was better when I was single. Now that you're here it is good to be in the master bedroom. I didn't notice that we needed more space until we had it."

"I noticed," said Hannibal, making Wil laugh.

"Should we get curtains? I don't like curtains but we can have them if you like them. I like seeing the land stretched out. I like that, at night, we're far enough from town that they only light comes from the moon and the stars. Without neighbors, we don't need privacy. I think

windows are picture frames for the beautiful fields and woods around the house. Each frame holds a glimpse of nature's most lovely work. I like waking up with the room filled with light; it helps me get up when I can't imagine facing Jack. But, what do you think?" asked Will.

With a small smile Hannibal said, "You can't give me that list and expect me to say I want curtains."

Shaking his head Will said, "I wake up alone two days a week, I can leave the curtains wide open when you're not here."

"Most of my desire for curtain comes from a dislike of city lights and a desire for privacy. There are no lights and no nosy neighbors. Don't get curtains."

Will smiled. In the bedroom they both dressed and Hannibal took out a thin, gemstone green tie and Will said, "This is a great birthday," as he tied his own tie.

"You changed your aftershave. The least I could do was try a new tie," said Hannibal tying a simple knot. "You genuinely like this more?"

"You really think the scent of joy is better than something with a ship on the bottle?" replied Will. Hannibal smiled and finished tying the tie.

Heading down the stairs Hannibal said, "You make coffee and let the dogs out; I'll get your gift from my car."

Will did as told, opening the back door for the dogs, refilling all their bowls and then turning his attention to the coffee. From behind him Hannibal said, "Happy birthday, Will."

Turning, Will saw a large, rectangular package on the table. It was only a couple of inches thick and Will's mind instantly told him that framed art would be revealed when he opened it. And, it was a large painting at that, something that would fill more space than just the place over the mantelpiece. It was easily seven feet long and three and a half feet wide. Will hoped he'd like it because, either way, he'd have to hang it. He poured the boiling water over the ground beans and went to the table.

He opened it carefully, removing tape from the seams. He never kept wrapping paper so he wasn't sure why he'd always been gentle with it. Something about wrapping paper demanded respect. Maybe it was just that gifts were such a large idea in Will's head. His father had always provided everything he could for his children, gifts hadn't been a part of that. They'd gotten gifts on their birthdays and Christmas but never just because their dad wanted them to have a gift.

As he'd gotten older gifts had become less rare; as his brothers moved out his dad had had fewer mouths to feed and, subsequently, a little extra money. But those gifts had been things like brand-name granola bars, new secondhand waders, genuinely new sneakers with company logos on them. Those gifts, his benefiting from their being out of the house and his having their dad's full attention were all part of the reason his brothers didn't like him. He had a feeling that what was hidden by this wrapping paper was significantly more impressive

that the pair of high-top red Reeboks that had both laces and Velcro, but he'd had the same feeling of appreciation and pleasure then. They were gifts motivated by love. Hannibal didn't need to give him a gift; he was Will's gift. But, despite that, he was taking paper off something Hannibal had picked for him. When he revealed the image, he readjusted that thought. Hannibal hadn't picked this piece of art for him: he'd painted it.

There, on canvas and in a nice, understated frame Will would have chosen himself, was an oil painting of his house as a boat. It was so beautiful, elegant. The long, un-mowed grass of the fields around his house became gentle waves. A little bit of nighttime fog morphed into seafoam. Lights were on in the house and the stars and moon shone down, it was alone, out to sea, and it was one of the most beautiful paintings Will had ever seen. The house was small compared to the size of the canvas, but it was perfect, off in the distance surrounded by the sea of grass. It was both a house and a boat, grass and water, fog and cresting waves. It made Will want to cry. It was just as he imagined it, just as he pictured it and he didn't understand how Hannibal had gotten it so perfectly right. He stared at it, had to stop himself from touching the oil, from stroking his beautiful fantasy made solid.

"Do you like it?" asked Hannibal softly. Will couldn't find words, he had a lump in his throat and his heart was on fire. "It's okay if you don't like it. Other people's visions can be so hard to realize."

"It's perfect," said Will. "So perfect I never want to look away. I'm glad I don't have any art in our room; it's going on the wall facing the bed so it's the last thing I see every night and the first thing every morning. It makes my chest hurt to look at it. It's beautiful." He turned to kiss the man, worshipping the lips that sometimes curled so slightly with distaste at others but never at him. The hands that had killed people when the man was a surgeon, but had always handled Will with such care and gentle respect, settled on his waist. They held, kissed, appreciated and Will knew it was going to be the best birthday he'd ever had. Hannibal backed him against the counter and one hand left his waist and Will heard the unmistakable sound of the plunger on his coffee pot depressing. He laughed into Hannibal's mouth and pulling away he said, "You're making coffee instead of giving me your full attention?"

"I have a lot of attention to share." Hannibal kissed him again and breaking away he said, "It's your birthday but it's still a weekday."

"It's a beautiful painting," said Will. "Thank you."

"Happy birthday, I'm just glad it's at least close to your vision."

"It's absolutely perfect," said Will. "It's like you've seen it through my mind's eye. A Polaroid of a dream."

Hannibal poured them both coffee and said, "Do you want left over cake for breakfast? It's not your real cake but it is a time honored tradition. I would have made something but I've been so focused on tonight."

"Cake for breakfast is a fine tradition," said Will. They ate the cake cold with heated heavy cream. The center that had been liquid the night before was now a thick syrup that was

almost pudding-like in its consistency. “This is delicious.” He smiled, “Hannibal, that painting. Thank you.”

“I’m so pleased you like it,” said Hannibal.

After breakfast, Will kissed Hannibal and said, “I love you and I’ll see you later.”

Hannibal stroked his cheek, “Happy birthday.”

Will patted all his dogs and walked over to class. There he taught, calm, happy. This was his life, the one he was supposed to have. He was happy all day until an hour before he was supposed to go home and he was talking about bruising, yet again. It was pleasant, right up until he saw Jack and he said, “Jack, this is a makeup class. You already interrupted this class once before.”

“Come to the lab after class.”

Will breathed out slowly and said, “I have to be home by five fifteen.” He looked at his hands, not willing to make eye contact. He heard the door shut and said, “Remember, bruises don’t occur posthumously.” He continued with his speech.

After the class, he sat down and breathed slowly, trying to get his head straight before going to the lab. Jack wasn’t in the room and Beverly smiled. “Hey there, birthday boy.” He gave her a small smile. “How’s it going so far?”

“Perfect until I walked in here,” said Will. “You know I love my classroom.”

“It’s your birthday?” asked Brian and Will nodded. “Happy birthday.”

“Thanks,” Will said as Jimmy echoed the other man’s well wishing.

“I know you said no gifts,” said Beverly.

Will nodded, “I said it and I meant it.”

Rolling her eyes, she took a card from her purse. “It’s not a real present, calm down.” She handed him the card.

He opened it and saw it was a picture of dogs, all in a pile. He smiled at it and opened it, it was a printed card with blanks for a name and occasion to be written in. Beverly had filled it out. “Dear Will, Happy birthday. A donation has been made in your name to the Washington Animal Rescue League. In your honor, Bev has given twenty-five meals to dogs in local shelters.” Underneath the message, Beverly had written happy birthday with far too many exclamation marks. He smiled at the card and at her.

“Thank you, Bev. That’s really kind of you.”

“Happy birthday, I knew you’d like it,” said Beverly.

Will put the card in his inside coat pocket and said, “Hannibal is expecting us for dinner at my house at five fifteen.”

“I’m excited,” said Beverly.

“JT came over for dinner. I made Cajun paella and Hannibal barely sat down to eat. He’s been cooking for days. There are five desserts.”

“I thought this was a small party,” said Beverly.

“There are six of us,” agreed Will. Shrugging he said, “The other day, when he was making homemade truffle oil, I told him he was going overboard. He said that you only turn thirty-three once.”

Beverly nodded, agreeing with his words, “I’m excited.” Will gave her a small smile just as Jack came in. Then it was pictures from a grim crime scene. And Will wanted to scream, he could feel it behind his teeth. He told Jack what he saw and Bev gave a run down and then she said, “Will and I have to go.”

“I need you here,” said Jack.

“Jack, I put it in writing last week that I had dinner plans,” said Beverly. “And Will doesn’t work here.” Will said nothing, grateful for Beverly fighting the fight for him. “Hannibal is having a dinner party.”

“You and Will’s sparkling personality are just going to have to miss it.”

Will breathed in so slowly, trying to stay even. Beverly spoke for him, “Jack, it’s Will’s birthday. It’s his birthday party. If we don’t go, then Will’s friends will be eating without him. Hannibal is throwing the dinner party at Will’s house. Will’s oldest friend flew in from New Orleans. While you might find his company lacking, no one else does. It’s Will’s birthday party and I’m his ride. So, we’re going. I will come in tomorrow; he will not. It’s his birthday.” She grabbed her jacket and Will said nothing.

“Thank you,” he said, once they were in her car.

“Don’t mention it,” said Beverly. “He’s been tap dancing on my last nerve. I think your personality is just fine.”

“Is that coat wine or burgundy?” he asked, looking at the leather of her jacket. It was an easier choice of topic.

“Neither, it’s maroon,” said Beverly.

“It’s pretty. Thank you for feeding those dogs, it’s awesome.”

“Happy birthday,” said Beverly. They pulled up to the house where the Prius was already parked.

“JT’s here,” said Will.

The dogs greeted them at the door and Will took a knee to cuddle them all, drawing them each in for a hug. Beverly patted them each to say hello. Hannibal and JT came out of the kitchen. “There’s the birthday boy,” said JT. He was holding a familiar white box. “I know you said no presents but it isn’t, not really. This is just restocking you.”

Will smiled, accepting the large box from Southern Candymakers. Opening it he saw it was half divinity while the other half was a mix. “You’re a nice person,” he said. “Thank you.”

“Happy birthday. I’m glad my trip coincided with this,” he said, then smiled at Beverly. “Hi, I’m JT, Will’s old friend.”

“Bev,” she said, shaking his hand, “not a particularly old friend.”

“Nice to meet you,” said JT. “Any friend of Will’s is bound to be interesting. I didn’t think I would beat you here.”

“Jack pulled me in. Then he was being difficult,” Will gave the ghost of a smile. “Difficult enough that I need to go and breathe if I want to have fun tonight.”

“We can talk amongst ourselves,” joked Beverly.

Hannibal caught his hand as Will passed him to go up the stairs. He gave with a gentle kiss and Will smiled against his lips. “I’ll be okay. I’ll change out of my suit.”

“There’s a box from your father on the bed,” said Hannibal.

Will smiled and went upstairs; the dogs followed him. He went into the bedroom and put on jeans and his Boulder sweatshirt, staring at the painting Hannibal had hung for him. It was beautiful and he breathed out. He opened the box on the bed, finding three new zydeco CDs, a delicate, not-meant-to-be-used fly, homemade fish jerky and a nice, nice pocket knife. He smiled at the things and slid the knife into his pocket. The fly had its hook imbedded into a wine cork.

He went into his newly furnished office, his totally private space. The dogs followed and Will sat down on the floor. The dogs all sat around him, pushing against him and Will breathed so slowly. Gradually, he felt the coil unwind within him.

He toed on flip-flops in the bedroom, picked up his new fly and downstairs he smiled, “Better?” asked JT.

“My new doctor gave me a lot of breathing exercises. They work most of the time,” said Will. “I didn’t need to take a Klonopin.”

“Cool,” said JT. “That sweatshirt brings me back.”

Will thought of cold days on the docks, when people gently poked fun at his college education while he stayed warm as he worked in his favorite sweatshirt. Will gave a small smile, thinking of those easy days. “Nice times,” he agreed. “Look at the fly my father sent me.”

“Beautiful,” said Beverly. “Did he make that?”

“No, he made the jerky he sent me but this he bought,” said Will.

“Probably from Max Kayfield,” said JT, “he has a tiny tackle shop down by the river and he does beautiful things.”

Nodding Will said, “He made most of my really nice flies.”

Hannibal held out glasses saying, “Watermelon agua fresca.”

After taking a sip Will said, “That’s delicious.”

“It’s very simple but I wanted to start with something light,” Hannibal gave him a gentle kiss before turning to the oven and pulling out trays.

Will looked at the table and said, “Hannibal, that’s a lot of forks.”

“Yes, but there’s no Italian linen,” said Hannibal with a smile. The phone rang and he said, “That will be your father.”

“Sorry,” said Will to Beverly and JT.

“When you turn up early to a dinner party, these things happen,” said Beverly.

Will answered the phone and, hearing his dad’s voice he said, “Everyone was just admiring the new fly, thank you. I love my knife too.”

“Happy birthday, honey.”

“Thank you, Daddy,” Will took the phone out of the kitchen and went up to the bedroom, “and thank you for the music and jerky, it was really kind.”

“Next year I’ll be there with you,” said his dad.

“That’ll be great,” said Will. His dad asked what else Will had gotten for his birthday, “Bev bought meals for the local dog shelter, JT bought a big box from Southern Candymakers and Hannibal painted my house as a boat.” Looking at the painting he said, “It’s been great.”

They talked for a couple more minutes and Will said, “I should go; Hannibal’s hosting but I am the guest of honor.”

“You okay with that?”

“Almost,” said Will with a small laugh.

“Night, honey. Happy birthday.”

“Thanks, Daddy.”

“Love you, boy.”

“Love you too, Daddy.” He hung up and went downstairs with his new CDs.

He popped the new album from The Lost Bayou Ramblers into the machine and, as the intro played, JT said, “Skip to track four; it’s amazing.” Will did as told before popping a thing made out of crab and some kind of pepper into his mouth.

They chatted and snacked and drank different things until there was a knock at the door. He went to open it and saw Abigail and Alana. “Happy birthday,” they chorused.

“Thanks,” he said. “There’s tons of food; come into the kitchen.” In the kitchen he said, “Alana, you’ve met Bev. Abigail, I’m sure you two have seen each other but this my friend Bev, Bev, this is Abigail.”

Beverly held out her hand saying, “Hi, Abigail, it’s a pleasure.”

Abigail hesitated for half a moment and then smiled and shook her hand, “Hi.”

JT said, “Did you and Alana have a good chat?” he asked, looking concerned.

Abigail nodded, “I’m okay, just… After the lawyer’s yesterday.” She smiled at Will and reached into an oversized purse, she pulled out a thick wad of paper. Holding it out to Will, she said, “The first half is about you, Will, read it and let me know if you want me to change anything.”

“It’s your story,” he said, shaking his head, “you tell it how you want.”

“Will, you’re my family. I know you’d let me publish it. But that part of the story… It’s not just mine; it’s the story of what happened to us. I want you to be okay with it. The second half is what we needed to talk to a lawyer about. Read it and if you still want me to move in, yay.” Her lip quirked in a smile.

“We’re family, it doesn’t matter what happened: I want you to move in. Whatever it is, it’s not unforgivable,” he promised but she shook her head.

“Read it before you make the promise,” she said. Her voice was so earnest that Will nodded as he accepted the papers. She pulled something else out of her purse and said, “This is a birthday present.”

Will looked at the friendship bracelet and smiled. “Nobody listened to my request for no gifts.”

“It’s nothing. I could do this or make ashtrays. Craft therapy. I think it’s total bull, but it makes the day go by. It’s your colors.”

He looked at the blue, green, gray bracelet and held his wrist out. “Thank you,” he said. She tied a simple knot and he said, “Double it, that could come off.”

“If I double it, you won’t be able to get it off without cutting it,” she pointed out.

“That’s okay,” said Will. “I have no intention of taking it off. Kids at school used to have them. You’re supposed to wear them until they eventually wear out and fall off. Then you get to make a wish. If a nine-year-old can do it, so can I.” She smiled at him and double knotted it. “Thank you,” he repeated. “I love it.” She smiled and squeezed his hand before releasing him.

“And this is just a card,” Alana held out an envelope.

He accepted it and opened it to see the same card Beverly had given him he smiled and said, “My friends know me.” He pointed to the other card, that he had put on the window ledge over the sink, “It’s perfect, the best gift to get duplicates of.” He moved to put the card next to its twin. “Thank you, I really didn’t want or expect any of this but I also really like and appreciate it all.”

Hannibal handed Will a new glass, with a new drink and said, “Here’s to you, Will. Happy birthday.” Everyone raised their glasses and echoed him. With a smile he said, “That’s it, you can relax, Will, the attention is over.” That made Will chuckle and then Calvin tried to climb up his leg. He rubbed the dog’s head and before eating something with foam and caviar on a tiny spoon. The evening turned to talks of house renovation.

Abigail said she wanted to see the painting. Will studied her face, not meeting her eyes, she wanted to get him alone for a moment. Understanding that feeling, Will said, “Yeah, you can see it; you live here but I don’t feel comfortable with having everyone upstairs.” He knew it was unwelcoming, but he felt uncomfortable, and he knew they would understand.

“You two go,” said Beverly. “We can be left here with snacks.”

Will took the papers and led Abigail upstairs. He put the pages on his desk. And pointed at the couch. “That’s a pullout from Ikea.”

“How much swearing was there?” she asked with a smile.

Shaking his head, he said, “I paid someone to put it together.”

“Cheating,” she said and he smiled at her before heading to his bedroom and gestured at the painting. She stared at it and after a handful of moments, genuinely considering her opinions, she said, “I think it’s spooky.”

“I love it,” said Will. “It’s exactly the way I want it to be.”

“Spooky,” repeated Abigail.

He just laughed. Buster came in and instantly went to Abigail. “He likes you.”

“I like him,” she replied and scooped up the dog. “The picture is spooky.”

“It’s exquisite,” said Will.

“How is my room?” asked Abigail.

“Empty but not ready, want to see it without any furniture?” asked Will. She nodded and they went back down. Hannibal met them at the bottom of the steps with a plate of devils on horseback. Will took one and gave him a swift kiss. “We’re looking at Abigail’s room.” He put the tasty morsel into his mouth.

“Having a good time?” asked Hannibal.

Will nodded. After swallowing he said, “Thank you for a happy birthday.”

“You don’t have to thank me for anything. I like throwing dinner parties. If you enjoy this we might be able to throw small, intimate dinner parties with some combination of this crowd in the future. I could do six courses for no particular reason.” Will gave him another brief kiss. Abigail reached for an hors d'oeuvre and Hannibal said, “No, go for the ones on the other side. Those have blue cheese.” Abigail smiled and took one of the ones without cheese.

They went into her room and Will said, “I will be painting and staining it soon. I’m redoing all of the floors tomorrow.”

“I can’t wait to see it,” said Abigail.

“Abigail, thank you for my bracelet. I really like.”

“If you want to take it off you should undo the double knot now, before it gets tight. It doesn’t really go with a suit.”

He shook his head, “No, I genuinely like it, Abigail, I’m not being polite. You’ve never seen me totally normal. When I’m not exposed to any field work I’m just a mild mannered scientist who hangs out with dogs. I’m not suave or a suit guy. I have three suits: the one I wear when Hannibal wants to go somewhere nice and two tweed ones for school. Other than that it’s all plaid, jeans and comfy sweaters. I wear what I like, to be comfortable while fishing, playing with the dogs and building boats. I’m not stylish or cool. I like the bracelet. I’m working to get out of the field and then you won’t see me in this house wearing anything but comfy sweaters and jeans.”

Smiling she said, “I’m glad you like it and that you won’t be in the field.” She looked around and said, “Maybe, in a couple of weeks — once you’ve painted and learned the full truth — we can go get my furniture.”

“I’d really like that,” said Will.

“Bev works with Jack Crawford, doesn’t she?” she asked softly, glancing nervously back toward the kitchen.

“She’s my friend, Abigail. Jack isn’t allowed in my house. Only my friends are allowed here. Bev isn’t judging you, she doesn’t think you’re a murderer.”

With a slow nod she said, “Read the pages this weekend.” He went to her and hugged her. She leaned in and said, “I know how much you hate touching most people so I really like it when you hug me.”

“I love you, Abigail,” he reminded her. “And I wouldn’t invite anyone here who wasn’t a good person. This is my home. It’s your home. Only the good guys are allowed in here.”

“I love you too, Will.”

“You ready to rejoin the party?”

“Was I obvious?”

“No, I am very familiar with the signs of wanting to get out of a room. You weren’t that interested in my beautiful painting.”

“You mean your creepy painting?” she said teasingly.

“It moves me like a breeze in the tree leaves: gently and perfectly. We all need to be moved sometimes.”

She smiled at him, “I’m glad you’re moved, you deserve to be moved. I’m ready to rejoin the party. Sorry.”

“I liked the break.” They went back to the kitchen where Hannibal issued them with eggshells, cut into little bowls filled with scrambled eggs and caviar and crème fraiche. The eggs were perfectly scrambled and soft on Will’s tongue. “Delicious, Hannibal.”

“Good.”

“Alana, how did your students’ test go?” asked Will.

Alana filled them in on class. Will told them stories of how stupid his students were and how he feared for the future of the FBI. Everyone was laughing. Then Bev told a story about her baby sister getting away with bad behavior that was even funnier than Alana’s story. Then Hannibal was plating things and it was all sexy motion that Will loved watching. He drank a lemon and raspberry thing that was slightly bubbly. “Hannibal, is this homemade soda?”

“Yes, I can knock your socks off even when I’m using nothing but traditional meat and unoriginal foodstuffs.”

“The effort you go to for me is humbling,” said Will.

Hannibal just gave him a tiny smile as they sat down to the first course. It was course after course of delicious food. Will’s kitchen was filled with appreciative noises and easy conversation that Will didn’t participate in at all. He listened, he enjoyed the food and the way his friends interacted so well. It was like he when he introduced a new dogs to his boys. He was careful, watched them, and then they always became best friends. He only ever brought good souls home. Each course was tastier than the last. The foams were light, the flavors were balanced; everything was perfect. It was a perfect dinner, a perfect party and a perfect birthday. The meat was perfectly cooked. None of the courses were too large, which meant that he could still enjoy the plate with far too many desserts. No one sang to him, which he appreciated. The cake was delicious. It wasn’t emotionally better than rainbow cupcakes, but it was one of the tastiest cakes he’d ever eaten.

After dinner, over coffee people were starting to talk about going. Alana was taking Abigail back to the hospital and JT said, “Bev, would you like to see the view from my hotel room? I can see a highway.”

“Sounds great,” said Beverly. “I’ve never seen that.” Will laughed, “Shut up, birthday boy. I am a grown ass woman and can make my own choices.”

“Yes you can,” agreed Will. “I just think it’s funny.”

“Will predicted you and I would have a one night stand,” said Beverly.

“It’s not a one night stand,” said JT. “I’m here through Sunday morning. We could have a forty-eight hour stand. But I do have a breakfast meeting with Abigail and I was planning on sweet talking Will into taking me to a barbeque place his dad raves about.”

“It’s amazing,” agreed Will. “I’m glad you’re back in my life, JT, when you and Abigail are done with your book we should not go back to radio silence.”

“Agreed,” said JT. “I missed you… and I don’t want to lose out on Hannibal’s cooking.”

Will laughed and raised his coffee cup in a mock toasting gesture. “Hannibal, this was amazing.”

“I’m glad,” said Hannibal with a smile. “I wanted this to be pleasant without pressure.”

“You pulled it off.” He tilted his coffee mug and said, “To Hannibal.”

“To Hannibal,” everyone echoed and Hannibal gave them all a small smile.

It had been a good birthday.

End Notes

Comments and kudos are always very appreciated. I hope you liked this!

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